

# Excerpts from "The Odyssey"

## *The Archery Contest*

### **Background:**

The wicked suitors continue their rowdy behavior in the house of Odysseus. They feast and enjoy music played by slaves. They also force Penelope to choose one of them as a husband. She announces that she will marry the man who can string Odysseus's bow and shoot an arrow from it. One by one, the suitors try, but none have the skill to do the task. Odysseus, who has arrived at his house disguised as an old man, asks to join the contest. All of the suitors ridicule and laugh at the old man for trying something that requires great strength and skill. But the old man—who is really Odysseus—strings the bow and shoots the arrow with ease!

### **Excerpt:**

A suitor would glance at his neighbor, jeering, taunting,

"Look at our connoisseur of bows!"

"Sly old fox—

maybe he's got bows like it, stored in *his* house."

"That, or he's bent on making one himself."

"Look how he twists and turns it in his hands!"

"The clever tramp means trouble—"

"I wish him luck," some cocksure lord chimed in,

"as good as his luck bending that weapon!"

So they mocked, but Odysseus, mastermind in action,

once he'd handled the great bow and scanned every inch,

then, like an expert singer skilled at lyre and song—

who strains a string to a new peg with ease,

making the pliant sheep-gut fast at either end—

so with his virtuoso ease Odysseus strung his mighty bow.

Quickly his right hand plucked the string to test its pitch

and under his touch it sang out clear and sharp as a swallow's cry.

Horror swept through the suitors, faces blanching white.